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STATE FOR AF/S AND INR  
STATE PASS TO USAID

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [WA](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH OPPOSITION POLITICIAN

Classified By: Ambassador Mathieu, for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary

1. (C) Ambassador Mathieu and Poloff met on August 27 with Congress of Democrats (COD) Member of Parliament Nora Schimming-Chase. Schimming-Chase predicted that the current leadership impasse between factions of the COD would be resolved by November and the party would be united going into the 2009 elections. Schimming-Chase did not assess that the contest would be free and fair and stated that opposition parties needed to coordinate their 2009 election strategies to break SWAPO's absolute majority in Parliament. Schimming-Chase, who also serves as the vice-chairperson of the Southern African Development Community-Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF), noted that the organization will find it difficult to monitor upcoming elections in Angola, Namibia, Swaziland and Zambia, as USAID has frozen aid to the organization. The Member of Parliament noted that tensions within SWAPO were evident, as party members accused one another of having close ties to the opposition Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP). Schimming-Chase expressed concern over recent rhetoric and actions from some SWAPO politicians, and the negative impact on the political environment. End Summary

2. (U) Ambassador Mathieu and Poloff met on August 27 with prominent independence activist and Member of Parliament from the opposition Congress of Democrats (COD) Nora Schimming-Chase. Schimming-Chase leads one of two factions vying for control of the COD following a contested party congress in March 2007; the other faction is headed by Parliamentarian Ben Ulenga.

Impasse Resolved by November?

3. (C) Schimming-Chase predicted that the current impasse between factions of the COD would be resolved through a party congress by November and that the party would be united going into the 2009 elections. She noted that the leadership struggle between the two factions had resulted in the party losing standing and respect in Parliament, although she noted that support for the party on the ground remained strong. She acknowledged, though, that the continued infighting has the party's supporters anxious, especially with an election slated for next year. The parliamentarian attributed much of the party's support to the multi-ethnic character of the organization, asserting that the COD was the only party in Namibia not organized along ethnic lines. She declared that, in spite of the recent tensions within the party, observers recognize the COD's positive contributions to parliamentary debates.

Voter Irregularities Likely in 2009

4. (C) Schimming-Chase was skeptical that the 2009 elections would be free and fair. She noted that voting irregularities had occurred in 2004, but pointed out that the COD could not afford to continue fighting the contested results in court. The government, she said, does not comply with SADC and African Union (AU) election standards it has endorsed, as cast ballots in Namibia are not counted the same

day and results are not announced as they are received.

15. (C) Declaring that opposition parties would benefit from coordinating their 2009 election strategies to break SWAPO's absolute majority in Parliament, Schimming-Chase reported that the RDP had approached the COD to discuss election-related cooperation. The parliamentarian thought opposition parties could collaborate particularly in pressing for greater transparency in the electoral process and in ensuring an opposition election monitor presence at every polling place in the country. Schimming-Chase encouraged the U.S. to help train opposition election monitors, citing the positive role played by well-trained election observers during Zimbabwe's most recent election.

#### Africa Loses an Election Monitor

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16. (C) Schimming-Chase, who serves also as the vice-chairperson of SADC-PF, told us the organization will likely not monitor Namibia's election, as USAID has frozen the organization's funding. She stated that SADC-PF members were working to resolve the issues that had resulted in the freezing of the funds, and she anticipated that senior SADC-PF officials may call an emergency meeting of the executive to discuss the matter. The funding freeze has derailed the organization's plans to monitor upcoming elections in Angola, Swaziland, and Zambia, she said.

#### Tensions within SWAPO Evident

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17. (C) The Member of Parliament noted that tensions within SWAPO were evident, as party members accuse one another of being RPD sympathizers. She thought the RDP posed a serious challenge to SWAPO's electoral dominance in the voter-rich north of the country. She stated that the tensions within the ruling party were most apparent on the floor of Parliament.

18. (C) Echoing the views of many of her peers, Schimming-Chase expressed concern over SWAPO's recent undemocratic rhetoric and actions. She expressed her view that troubling statements from some senior SWAPO politicians were part of a broader strategy by the ruling party to intimidate and harass opposition party members and supporters, as party and government leaders did not chastise those responsible.

#### Comment

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19. (U) Shimming-Chase, a veteran of Namibia's independence movement, clearly believed that Namibia is at a critical political crossroads, where the country could either continue to strengthen its democratic institutions, or, alternatively, begin to move down a path toward autocracy. Although unhappy with what she saw as a worsening political environment, she was hopeful that opposition parties, with the help of church groups that earlier played a significant and positive role in Namibia's independence struggle, could help ensure that the country moves down the former path rather than the latter.

MATHIEU